

Binghamton, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today highlighted efforts he is undertaking to convince the White House to release a significant level of emergency funding to help low-income Southern Tier residents pay their home heating bills during the winter months. In December 2009, Hinchey helped Congress pass a bill, which included \$4.5 billion nationally for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program's (LIHEAP) regular budget. The measure also included \$590 million in emergency contingency funds, which can only be allocated at the president's discretion. With New York experiencing an extraordinarily cold winter, Hinchey this week joined more than 100 of his House colleagues in formally calling on the White House to release the additional contingency funds now in order to help more people stay warm.

"The economic downturn has been very difficult for some Southern Tier residents and families and this home heating assistance can relieve a big financial strain while helping to ensure that they stay warm during this very cold winter season," Hinchey said. "We have a moral obligation to ensure that no one in our region has to suffer in the brutal cold this winter. The release of the contingency funding is critical for Southern Tier residents who are struggling to figure out how to pay for housing, heating, food, medicine, and other necessities. I am hopeful that President Obama will soon release the contingency funding and I will continue to join my colleagues in Washington in pressuring him until he does just that."

Of the \$5.1 billion total in LIHEAP funds, New York will receive more than \$475 million in regular funds. All of the regular funding has been sent to the state, but has not been fully distributed to the public yet. The state continues to field requests from low-income residents for LIHEAP assistance. The state stands to receive an additional \$62 million in contingency funds if the president releases them. On January 11, Hinchey along with 112 of his colleagues in the House sent a letter (dated January 8) to President Obama, requesting that he release the additional \$590 million in contingency funds to address the needs of families and seniors that are struggling to heat their homes this winter.

Last year, Broome Tioga, and Delaware counties -- the Southern Tier counties Hinchey represents in Congress -- received more than \$17 million in LIHEAP funding that fulfilled more than 22,000 requests for assistance. The average level of LIHEAP assistance for each household across New York last year was \$596. Based on last year's distribution numbers, Broome, Delaware, and Tioga counties are in line to receive an estimated total of \$15.4 million in regular LIHEAP funds this year. If the president releases that contingency funding as Hinchey and his colleagues requested, those counties would receive an estimated total of \$1.8 million in extra funds for a total of \$17.2 million in 2010.

More specifically, Broome County will receive an estimated total of \$8.35 million in regular LIHEAP funds and should expect an additional \$1 million if the contingency funds are released; Delaware County will receive an estimated total of \$3.37 million in regular LIHEAP funds and should expect an additional \$400,000 if the contingency funds are released; and Tioga County will receive an estimated \$3.68 million in regular LIHEAP funds and should expect an additional \$400,000 if the contingency funds are released.

New York is experiencing an extremely cold winter. Thus far, the average temperature in Broome County this month has been 16.9 degrees, which is 5.5 degrees below average. LIHEAP benefits are available to low-income New Yorkers until May 15, 2010 or until funding runs out. Eligibility is based on income and living circumstances. Those who qualify can apply for LIHEAP benefits by mail, in person at their local social services office, over the phone, or online. For further information, members of the public may go to www.otda.state.ny.us/main/heap or call the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance toll-free hotline at 1-800-342-3009. The public is also welcome to contact Hinchey's office for any additional assistance.